The Knife and the Lure

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/9862376.

Rating:	Mature
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham/Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Will Graham, Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham's Father
Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Soulmates, Skill Sharing, Somebody save Will Graham, Not You Hannibal, Oh well I tried, POV Alternating
Language:	English
Series:	Part 2 of Hannigram Soulmate Collection
Stats:	Published: 2017-02-22 Words: 2,756 Chapters: 1/1

The Knife and the Lure

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Summary

"Do you have a soulmate?"

Hannibal is nothing if not direct when he wants to be. Will wrinkles his face into a grumpy scowl.

"I don't believe in that."

Hannibal blinks thoughtfully. "It's not a question of belief, Will. It's science."

Notes

A birthday gift for Slippy, my Murder Nakama. Soulmate prompt: "Sharing gifts and talents with your soulmate".

Happy Birthday, love!

See the end of the work for more notes

i.

When Will's mother left, he had to teach himself how to cook. He wasn't very good at it.

His father was always kind and patient. He smiled through the burnt eggs and toast, through soft overcooked carrots and too-hard spaghetti. Robert Graham had never learned how to cook himself, and the hours he worked were long, and his small son was so insistent that he do this, *please Dad, you do everything else let me help*.

Eventually, the meals improved a little, but not by much. Canned food became more and more of a staple - much easier to heat on the stove and hard to mess up. Sometimes Robert would catch Will sniffling in the kitchen corner.

"I can't even chop vegetables right," he would say, and Robert would put a hand on his knee (not hold him, Will didn't like hugs since his mother went away) and give him a squeeze.

"But you can fish," Robert told him, "better'n I can. You're doing just fine, Will. Just fine."

And Will would smile, watery but real, and pull the can opener from the drawer. Spaghetti-Os were his Dad's favourite anyway.

Robert Graham died five years later. Too early to see Will's sudden and strange developing skill.

He didn't get to see Will make his first roux, perfectly and from scratch, without measuring a single one of his ingredients.

He missed the first time Will picked up a knife and began to chop peppers effortlessly, like he could do it blindfolded, like he'd been doing it for years.

He wasn't there to taste the most perfectly cooked steak, rare - the way Robert had liked it - pink and bloody on the inside.

And he never saw the day that Will realized how he had developed such a skill, and why. Which was good, really. Will would never have wanted to break his father's heart.

ii.

Hannibal has never really cared for animals.

He doesn't dislike them, but the word 'tolerate' is about as far as his compassion extends. Which is why he finds it so odd that dogs like him so much.

Ever since he was about ten years old, dogs have immediately warmed to him - house pets and stray alike. They pad happily toward him with lolling tongues and rub their noses in the palm of his hand. Sometimes, they *lick him*. Honestly, it's terrible.

He tries gently pushing them away, but they always take it a sign of *yes pets now* and they push their muzzles firmly into his hand and he ends up petting them against his will. It gets to the point where he actively avoids dogs because hair just instantly gets everywhere and his coats are very expensive, thank you very much.

He's pretty sure he'll never understand why dogs are so strangely drawn to him. It just doesn't make any sense.

And then he meets Will Graham.

iii.

The truth about Will's empathy is this: it's not empathy.

Empathy implies a kinship, a level of understanding, perhaps even comfort. Will possesses none of these things. When he dives into the mind of a murderer, he just understands. Understands as easily (and mysteriously) as he understands what knife to use for loin and which for liver.

(In retrospect, this should have been a giant clue).

The knowing makes him sick, but what makes him sicker is the aftertaste of enjoyment. It lingers and licks at his brain, long after the pendulum has made its final swing.

There's something very wrong with him.

He tells Jack that he can't do this anymore, but he's confronted with how many lives he is saving with his ability. He doesn't tell Jack that in doing so he's sacrificing his own, piece by soul-splintering piece.

So he keeps on, watching over the ghosts of crime scenes and bringing their inhabitants back to life only to kill them once more. And every time, the thread of *thisfeelsgood* tugs more insistent. Every time, the fight against his own delight loses ground. Every time, he takes a piece of his humanity and sets it aside before he dives in.

It's never there when he comes back up for air.

Jack suggests he see a psychiatrist. Will is recalcitrant to say the least, mostly because it's less of a suggestion and more of an ambush. The psychiatrist is waiting for them in Jack's office, his expression genteel and placid. Will can tell by the way this man dresses and holds himself that he is not equipped to adequately handle the darkness inside Will. He doesn't need to bare his ugly soul to someone whose idea of hardship is missing a night at the opera.

But then the psychiatrist looks at him, looks hard with his dark eyes that don't seem to have pupils, and he pulls on that thread that Will has tried desperately to tuck inside his ribs.

"No forts in the bone arena of your skull for things you love," the psychiatrist says, which is simultaneously the most pretentious thing Will's ever heard and also, shockingly, true.

The psychiatrist's name is Dr. Hannibal Lecter, and instantly Will knows he will never be able to forget that name.

iv.

Hannibal's first appointment with Will Graham is... interesting.

He picks up on the dog hair on Will's trousers immediately and with great interest. It's a far stretch, he knows, but there's something about this prickly but beautiful man that makes him beg the question *could it be you*?

"Do you have a soulmate?"

Hannibal is nothing if not direct when he wants to be. Will wrinkles his face into a grumpy scowl.

"I don't believe in that."

Hannibal blinks thoughtfully. "It's not a question of belief, Will. It's science."

"Not for everyone," Will rebuts, "I know plenty of people who don't have one."

"'Don't have' is different from 'never met'."

"Well then I haven't met mine."

"Are you sure?"

"Jesus," Will complains, "is this really why I'm here? I thought you were here to help me, not read my fucking fortune."

"I am here to help, Will." Hannibal keeps his voice at its most soothing level of calm. He's sure it'll piss Will off even more. "You have to allow my help first."

"This is complete bullshit." Will stands up and slings his bag over his shoulder. "I'm sorry for wasting our time."

He stalks over to the door. Hannibal does not stop him.

"Perhaps our next appointment could be over dinner," he calls from his seat. He hears Will go completely still, hand hovering at the doorknob.

"There's not going to be a next - did you just ask me on a date?"

Hannibal turns slowly over his shoulder.

"No," he replies, "I asked you to dinner. I think perhaps informal settings would work better for you."

"I - that's..."

"Think about it," Hannibal tells him, "you have my number. And I am an excellent cook."

Will starts at that, eyes wide. He opens his mouth to say something but seems to think better of it. Before Hannibal can push, Will is gone.

v.

Dinner goes better.

Will, as it turns out, is an excellent sous-chef, and the task of chopping vegetables seems to distract him with its easy rhythm.

"You have a natural hand at that," Hannibal observes.

Will shrugs. "It just sort of happened. Don't really know how, I just woke up one day and knew how to cook."

Hannibal goes quiet beside him. "You know what that sounds like."

Will laughs through his nose. "Yeah, sure, but it's not exactly a great lead. My soulmate knows how to cook, lots of people do."

He flicks his eyes toward Hannibal in a blink-and-you'd-miss-it glance. Hannibal does not blink, and does not miss it. Will, he's certain, is checking him out.

"Your soulmate doesn't just know how to cook, they know how to cook well."

Will actually, honestly, grins at him.

"Are you jealous, Dr. Lecter?"

"Absolutely not."

The grin falters on Will's face before it slips off completely.

"I was just joking," he mutters quietly.

Hannibal, purposefully, ignores him, and sets his attention to the meat in the oven.

"Have you developed any other skills?"

"No," Will says, "not that I know of. Unless my empathy came from him, but I'm pretty sure that's all my own fucked up brain."

Him, Hannibal notes, Will's soulmate is a *him*, not a *her* or *them*. His luck is improving dramatically.

"Perhaps the empathy is a mirrored skill," he suggests.

"A mirrored skill?"

Hannibal nods. "There is a debate as to the validity of this theory, but some studies suggest that our soulmates can manifest skills in compliment. For example, one person may be exceptionally skilled at piano, and their soulmate in turn develops perfect pitch."

Will stops chopping. His voice turns quiet and uncertain. "What would that make my soulmate?"

Hannibal pulls a tray of baked loin from the oven.

"I have no idea."

vi.

"Have you inherited any skills?"

Will has been itching to ask this question for weeks now. Hannibal shakes his head.

"Not that I'm aware of."

It's difficult for Will to hide his disappointment. His skill sets are pretty damn specific. If Hannibal had picked up on his, he'd know by now.

(Hannibal, in fact, has just discovered he knows how to make the perfect lure despite having never done so before, but he's not going to tell Will this yet).

"Maybe your cooking is a skill, like mine."

"Oh no, Will. My culinary skills are entirely my own, I assure you."

Will's cheeks colour at that and he looks away. The idea of a younger Hannibal sweating over a butcher block with his sleeves rolled up just does something to him. Hell, the idea of Hannibal doing that now does something to him. He doesn't know what it is about this slightly odd man, but he feels drawn to him. Hannibal has become an unwitting beacon for him, a refuge from the dark, a lighthouse to keep it at bay.

Except he doesn't hide his darkness from Hannibal, and whilst Hannibal doesn't necessarily encourage it he certainly doesn't mind talking about it at length. He doesn't mind assuring Will in his purring cadence that there isn't anything wrong with him, that his mind is simply fascinating, that he is a rare creature indeed.

These probably aren't things that a therapist should say, Will thinks, but he doesn't want him to stop. Hannibal's unique brand of affection is imprinting on him, on every part of him, and the feeling of it is intoxicating.

It isn't until much later, when it's far, far too late, that Will realizes Hannibal was never a lighthouse at all. By then the darkness has already claimed them both.

vii.

They're in Hannibal's kitchen. Will is rubbing spices into carefully sliced kidney, and he can feel eyes boring into his hands. Will looks up at him and one lock of hair tumbles into his eye. Hannibal's nostrils flair.

"Find something you like?" Will teases. Will has started teasing him lately and he can tell that Hannibal fucking loves it.

"Just admiring," Hannibal replies.

"My remarkable culinary skills?"

"No," Hannibal says thickly, "that's not what I'm admiring."

And then he just stares at Will, openly, brazenly, and Will's eyes widen a fraction. The knife trembles in his hand and he sets it down before wiping his suddenly sweaty palms on the front of the apron Hannibal had lent him.

Hannibal steps closer. Will licks his lips.

"Are you going to--"

The question goes unanswered because Hannibal is already kissing him, cupping Will's jaw between his hands and running his thumbs over the grazing of stubble on his cheekbones. His lips are soft, but demanding, and it takes a bare hint of them parting for Will to return the kiss with tongue and teeth. His hands skid over Hannibal's waist and up his back, digging in with his fingertips as Hannibal works his mouth further open.

The kiss lasts for eternity, which is simply not long enough, and then Will forces himself to drag his mouth away.

"We can't do this," he says, and hates it.

Hannibal frowns, confusion writ large across his face.

"Why not?"

Will sighs and rubs a hand over his face. His lips are swollen. He feels like a bruise.

"You're not my soulmate," Will sighs, "it isn't fair to--"

And then Hannibal is shutting him up entirely, claiming his mouth again but even fiercer. One of his large palms takes a handful of Will's ass and squeezes hard.

"You're mine," Hannibal murmurs, "no one can take that from me."

Will braces his hands weakly against Hannibal's chest but he can't seem to stop kissing him.

"But I'm not," he mutters, "not really--"

"I can fish." Hannibal breaks away and stares into Will's eyes. "I can cast a perfect line and tie a perfect lure."

Will's heart leapfrogs his lungs and lodges in his throat.

"What are you saying?"

"Dogs," Hannibal says with a dry laugh, "love me. They always have and I could not see why until I met you."

He takes Will's hands between his.

"You're mine, Will. And I'm yours."

Will exhales one shaky, trembling breath, and then he buries the side of his face in Hannibal's chest.

"Fuck, I'm so glad." He kisses the spot over Hannibal's heart. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Hannibal's arms creep around him and hold fast.

"I needed to know you were ready."

Will closes his eyes and smiles. "Ready for what?"

Hannibal says nothing. Will tries to look up but finds himself held firmly in place.

"Hannibal?" He squirms slightly. Hannibal rests his cheek on the top of Will's head.

"My darling boy. Your empathy is the most beautiful mirror I could imagine."

Will stops breathing.

"Mirrored skills," Hannibal continues, "an incredible gift."

Will shakes his head.

"No," he says quietly, then louder, "*no*."

"Yes." Hannibal releases Will, just a little, and holds him by the shoulders so he can look deep into his eyes.

"You've known for months, my love. You've cooked by my side and never once asked where the meat came from because *you knew*." Hannibal tucks a finger under WIll's chin and lifts it up "Even before that, I think you knew.”

"I-I didn't..."

Except, Will realizes, he did. He gravitated towards Hannibal like a moth to a flame and didn't care who it burned so long as he could have a taste of the fire. He looked into Hannibal's eyes the day they met and saw everything.

It all comes to him at once:
meat, so much meat, red and slick under his fingers / knowing exactly how and where to cut / feeling where the bones had broken / seeing the beauty of his design / Hannibal's design / it's all there it was always there and he gave it to you, this gift, it's yours entirely / you don't get to hide from it now – besides,

It's too late

You love him, don't you?

"I do," Will whispers. Hannibal's mouth twists into a smile.

"You do... what, Will?"

Will exhales, and with it he releases the last piece of his soul.

"Everything," he says. He runs his palms up Hannibal's chest and turns his lips upward in offering. Hannibal's breath hovers hot over his skin.

"Good. Are you ready?"

Will nods and his eyes slip closed. The kiss is soft, and chaste. It feels important, like they've just sealed something permanent that can never be undone. Then Hannibal is pulling him down, an inexorable pull, and even when they hit the floor he's sure he's still falling.

The darkness is enveloping him, soft and shapeless, and it feels like Hannibal's mouth, it feels like Hannibal's kisses, it feels like Hannibal inside him lighting up every untouched part with black sparks and flame.

It feels like Hannibal's fingerprints, each one a brand burnt into his skin.

It feels like Hannibal moving and shifting above him, making room for himself inside Will's skeleton and taking root.

It feels like Hannibal's exhalation of his name, a prayer, something holy and fearful and full of dread.

When Will comes, there on the kitchen floor, his cry is swallowed by the dark, and he stops falling. Hannibal catches him.

"Whose skill was that?" Will asks much later, his body sore and deliciously tender. Hannibal looks up from the lazy mark he is sucking into Will's skin.

"Ours, my love." Hannibal's eyes are wide pools of black and Will dives in.

"From now on, everything is ours."

End Notes

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